

parallel to dominant cultural codes, but they may provide a starting place for new discourses of female sexuality. Indeed, the chief weakness of Levy's book may be its failure to offer alternative visions a truly liberated female sexuality. However, with wit, energy and passion she demands answers to the question of what it means for women to truly hold power, and whether this power is to be only sexual. In 2007 such questions may seem alarmingly retrogressive. They still need asking, nonetheless, and Levy's book stands as a challenge for women to confront and answer them.

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Breaking the Bowls: Degendering and Feminist Change. Judith Lorber. London: W. W. Norton and Co., 2005; xx + 236 pages; ISBN 0-393-97325-5; \$20.50US (paper).

With several books to hir¹ credit - including *Paradoxes of Gender* which has regularly appeared on Women's Studies syllabi since its 1994 publication - Judith Lorber is a preeminent US writer on the topic of gender. In this latest addition to hir oeuvre, Lorber purports to "show the cracks, anomalies, resistances, and multiplicities that are breaking down the gendered social order in Western postindustrial societies and how we can take the process further by deliberate degendering" (5). Lorber's objective for the process of degendering moves past the existing two sex regime and its replacement by idealized unisex social relations to a multiplex society where the "gendered structures of social orders are...dismantled" (5). Rejecting the current feminist agenda of gender parity, Lorber argues that true gender equality will only occur when we are free from gender; hence a totally gender-free society should be feminism's primary goal.

As an academic who works in the area of Sexuality Studies my response to Lorber's proposal is nothing less than enthusiastic. The 1990s had brought us to the brink of gender deconstruction with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, Queer Nation, and a new movement of "third wave" feminists who produced low-to-no budget 'zines such as *Function and Verboslammed* that celebrated the eradication of sex and gender alongside the rise of grrrl power.

Upon entering the twenty-first century it seemed that we missed only a cogent piece of writing that could bring the energy of the previous decade to a head, a map that could reveal the next turn on the road to socio-political transformation. With chapter titles such as "A World Without Gender: Making the Revolution," Lorber's volume held a promise that far exceeded both its slim appearance and, unfortunately, the material it delivered.

Structurally, Lorber's volume reads like four papers written for another purpose bookended by two additional essays that struggle to synthesize the pieces into a coherent text. The second and third chapters on parenting and work, for example, offer feminist summaries suitable for an introductory course with only scant mention of how sex roles might be reconfigured. If it seems somewhat untimely for a recent feminist work to reduce complexly gendered relations to sociological roles, then it is even more discrepant to include an entire chapter on the US media's uneven characterizations of female heroes after September 11 and during the attack on Iraq as if masculinized newspaper reporting was the only problem. Lorber seeks to redirect the aim of feminism across the Western world but defaults to an American perspective on a war that most of the West considers illegitimate, leading one to wonder if degendering specifically within the US military state is not its own feminist project.

The introductory and concluding chapters speak more directly to the issue of degendering but pose different problems. For example, Lorber submits a laudable strategy with hir call "on the so-called gender normals - biological, sexual, and gender 'straights' - to make the revolution by becoming gender deviants" (13) and extols the mid-op transsexual and no-op intersexual, but fails to recognize the revolutionary potential in those such as Ricki Wilchins, activist and Executive Director of GenderPAC, who have changed their sex/gender. Concluding that "degendering will encourage varieties of self-display" (176), Lorber herself encourages only those who break from popular binary expressions of gender while dismissing queering as a practice that is insensitive to transsexuals. There is an ample literature showing that gender is a more complex interplay between bodies, psyches, and social formations than Lorber presents.

Ideally, degendering should not just be an indictment to leave gender behind, but should offer the chance for any body to express any configuration of gender, from its traditional binary expression through its mixture to its opposite. It is difficult to see how degendering as Lorber proposes it evades a unisex social order yet even this is an ideal. While Lorber seems to be persuaded by Butler's notion that gender is a negotiation between a subject and the Law she neglects the implications of this idea. Gender binaries have not remained because we fail to see the benefits of degendering, but because we are socially ostracised, economically disenfranchised, physically and emotionally beaten, sexually assaulted and killed when we try to "break the bowls." I too look forward to a world where women and men are compensated for their work without regard to gender, but it seems that degendering should first and foremost address the issue of gender violence. Without this analysis, I am skeptical of the volume's worth for classroom use and, given my belief in Lorber's vision, that is really too bad.

Endnote

1. Since my dissertation was passed in May 2005, written entirely in gender neutral pronouns, I have advocated the adoption of the pronouns "sie," "hir," "hirs," and "hirsself," presently the most widely used format. Briefly stated, the most important reasons for this modification in language use are that pronominal gender duality supports the notion that the two-sex system is natural, that gendered pronouns enforce sex disclosure even in situations such as hiring where sex is not supposed to matter, and that this linguistic imposition of sex duality helps to make sex/gender policing a social norm.

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Undoing Gender. Judith Butler. New York & London: Routledge, 2004; 267 pages; ISBN 0-415-96923-9; \$31.05US (paper).

Contemplative, incisive, and highly readable, this compilation of Judith Butler's recent essays engages with a wide range of themes important to feminist inquiry. Gathered from previous presentation in scholarly journals, edited volumes, and at

conferences, this collection of eleven revised essays presents Butler's most current meditations on gender, sex, and sexuality, and engages with the "New Gender Politics" sprung from the productive ruptures in feminist and queer theory invoked by trans studies and the intersex movement.

Drawing on psychoanalysis and fresh readings of Foucault, Butler reconsiders the incest taboo, the (heterosexual) structure of kinship, the confession, social recognition, survival and vulnerability, and technologies of sex and gender. Underlying all of these essays is a profound questioning of what it means to "be human" and how expressions of sex, sexuality, and gender can make for impossible (or indeed "unlivable") lives under dominant relations of power. Equally, these compiled writings reflect on the ways in which normative categories of "the human" come "undone" under the rupturing effects of embodied lives that through living challenge regulatory regimes. Speaking especially, and even intimately, to those of us "who are living in certain ways beside ourselves, whether [...] in sexual passion, or emotional grief, or political rage" (20), Butler raises the urgent question of what "community" - and especially communities of resistance - might look like given complexities and differences that seem, at times, to thwart the possibility of "acting in concert." While many of these writings will be of particular interest to trans and non-trans embodied theorists grappling with the difficulties of "doing justice" to the complex intersections of "race," class, sex, gender, sexuality, power, social regulation and recognition in their studies, these essays will also appeal more generally to feminists who take a critical and/or philosophical position with respect to discourses of human rights.

It is perhaps the two essays "The End of Sexual Difference?" and "The Question of Social Transformation" that most closely reflect on the still productive question of what "sexual difference" and/or "gender" has to do with feminist politics, feminist theory, and for anything approaching a collective feminist position. If "gender" and "sexual difference" do not provide a stable foundation for feminist thought and critique, what does? In the latter of the two essays Butler includes a sensitive reconsideration of her early *Gender Trouble*, a book